

# REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN GLOBAL SYSTEMS: A SOCIAL SYSTEMS ANALYSIS OF EUROPEAN AND RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICIES IN UKRAINE

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## **ABSTRACT**

Brett Hurst: Regional Differences in Global Systems: A Social Systems Analysis of  
European and Russian Foreign Policies in Ukraine  
(Under the direction of Holger Moroff)

From late 2013 until the present, a series of crises and conflicts have wracked Ukraine and contributed toward regional insecurity. Scholarship on European and Russian foreign policy toward Ukraine has focused on understanding the theories underlying the policy decisions. This paper seeks instead to apply social systems theory to understand how regional differences contribute to differences in what Moravcsik calls *state preferences*, as expressed in states' foreign policies; this is done by investigating the foreign policies of the EU, Germany, Italy, Poland, and Russia toward Ukraine. European foreign policies tend to arise from economic concerns, and decision-making is often hobbled by member state bickering; Russian foreign policy, meanwhile, aims to maintain the privileged societal position of Russian elites at the top of the Russian political hierarchy. By understanding the regional variations from which foreign policy differences arise, it may be easier to find a resolution to the conflict.

To Chelsea Hurst, whose unflagging support and optimism are what made this paper possible. This thesis would be empty without her name here.

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## **CHAPTER 1: UKRAINE**

### **Introduction**

In 2013, Ukraine found itself split between the European Union and Russia. The Ukrainian president, Viktor Yanukovich, was weighing the merits of competing EU and Russian trade agreements when the Ukrainian government decided at the last minute to reject the much more popular European proposal in favor of the Russian (Saryusz-Wolski, 2014, p.3). Pro-Western anger rose and protesters took to the streets of Kyiv in a movement known as Euromaidan (MacDuffee Metzger et al., 2016, p.20). The protests escalated into riots after a violent government crackdown, and a months-long standoff in central Kyiv ultimately resulted in the removal of Yanukovich and the election of pro-Western Petro Poroshenko.

This election did not settle the dispute between Europe and Russia, however. Shortly thereafter, Russia annexed the pro-Russian Crimean peninsula, and pro-Russian separatists--aided by Russian money and matériel--instigated the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine (Saryusz-Wolski, 2014, pp.14-16). Meanwhile, Ukraine under Poroshenko revisited the European agreement and signed it, signaling a distinct convergence between Ukraine and the European Union. This was accompanied by bilateral and multilateral negotiations with the EU and European states in order to hammer out financial assistance and peace talks.

Ukraine lies in what the EU calls "the common neighborhood," meaning that it lies in a geographical gray area between European and Russian influence. The resulting (dis)harmony of European and Russian foreign policies toward the "common neighborhood" have had profound effects on the Ukrainian state. In order to understand the rationale behind

both European and Russian foreign policy, one must understand the theories behind the policymaking.

This paper considers two propositions: first, that social systems theory offers unique perspectives for understanding the foreign policy decisions of state and transnational actors, as illustrated by the foreign policymaking of European actors and Russia toward Ukraine; and second, that thus far academic insights into the foreign policymaking regarding Ukraine by these actors has focused on analyzing European policy in light of Cooper's postmodern world theory, and Russian policy in light of realist thinking (and in particular, offensive realism). Thus this paper offers a synthesis of these two propositions: that social systems theory not only offers a salient perspective on the formation of foreign policy (with a particular focus on European and Russian policies toward Ukraine), but that it also contributes to and critiques the current academic dialogue on the subject.

### **Section 1.1: Methodology**

This paper focuses on an analysis of the theoretical forces that shape foreign policy decisions, and thus each section begins with a description of the prevailing theoretical explanation behind an actor's (or set of actors') Ukraine policies. Each section ends with a social systems theory analysis. These analyses are accomplished using the following methodological recommendation by Luhmann (1997, p.73) as a guide:

“A sociological theory that wants to explain [regional] differences, should not introduce them as givens, that is, as independent variables; it should rather start with the assumption of a world society and then investigate, how and why this society tends to maintain or even increase regional inequalities. It is not very helpful to say that the Serbs are Serbs and, therefore, they make war. The relevant question is rather, whether or not the form of the political state forced upon all regions on earth fits to all local and ethnic conditions, or, whether or not the general condition, not of exploitation or suppression but of global neglect stimulates the search for personal and social, ethnic or religious identities.”

## **Section 1.2: The Actors**

The crises in Ukraine—whether in the economy, the government, or the war-torn East—affect far more than the state in which they are located. Ripples started in Ukraine have spread across Europe and Russia and beyond, in large part because of Ukraine’s many important connections to its surrounding regions.

In this paper, I focus on five foreign policy actors: the European Union, three EU member states, and Russia. Although the EU’s foreign policy is limited in scope (the deficiencies made up for by the policies of its individual member states), it has played (and continues to play) a critical role in the development of Ukraine’s political and economic situation. Beyond that, it is also a powerful rallying force among pro-Western Ukrainians, and it was a desire to draw closer to institutions like the EU that sparked the Euromaidan movement and its subsequent developments (MacDuffee Metzger et al., 2016, p.17).

Again, important aspects of European foreign policy are left to EU member states rather than the transnational institutions; therefore, within the EU, I also focus on the foreign policies of Germany, Italy, and Poland. I chose these three states in particular primarily due to their economic ties to Ukraine: Italy is the fifth largest export destination for Ukrainian goods, and Germany and Poland are, respectively, the second and fifth largest import origins for goods entering the Ukrainian market. These rankings represent billions of dollars worth of trade between these states (The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2017).

Although my criteria for selecting these three states was based on their economic ties, each carries additional significance beyond their trade linkages with Ukraine. Germany is the EU’s leading economic and political powerhouse. It was a founding member of the European



Coal and Steel Community and has been involved in the European project since its inception. Among our three examples, it may be seen as representing northern Europe.

Italy is often considered a rising power within the European Union. While it has yet to be as central an actor as Germany or France, Italy has a relatively large economy and has shown a willingness and occasional desire to improve its standing within the EU's power hierarchy. Italy joined the European Community during its second expansion alongside states like Spain and Portugal, and may be seen as representing the southern or Mediterranean region.

Poland has also been considered a rising power among the EU's newest cohort of members. In spite of its temperamental domestic politics, it plays an important leading role among other eastern EU member states, and is a member of the influential Visegrád Group alongside the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia. Poland is the newest member state of our three European examples, having joined in the most recent wave of acceding states (dubbed the Eastern Expansion). It may be seen as representative of the Central and Eastern European member states. Importantly, Poland also has strong cultural and historical linkages to Ukraine, leading to far more direct interaction between the two states than with either Italy or Germany.

Because the three European states chosen as case studies were selected due to their close economic ties with Ukraine, any analysis of their policymaking risks being inapplicable to other European actors whose economies are less dependent on Ukrainian trade. However, given that each of the case studies is also a prominent decision-making actor within the EU as well as a leader among member states in their respective geographic regions, I believe they are still valuable objects of analysis, as their foreign policy decisions influence those of their

neighbors and the EU community as a whole. Analyzing policymaking toward Ukraine among member states without such close economic ties would also be an interesting avenue of investigation, and may prove worthwhile as a future research project.

The fifth actor to be considered, after the EU and its three representative member states, is Russia. Russia and Ukraine have been intertwined for far longer than merely the current situation implies; their shared history extends for centuries, if not a millennium. Both nations trace their roots back to the Kyivan Rus civilization, which had its capitol in Kyiv but included important cities in what is now Western Russia. Even after the fall of the Kyivan Rus, the two nations have, through shared cultural heritage and geographic proximity, been consistently entangled with one another, from the 1654 Pereyaslav agreement allying Ukrainian Cossacks and Moscow against the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth through Ukraine's incorporation in the Soviet Union and subsequent independence (Rywkin, 2014, p.121). Russia's constant influence in Ukraine, and its direct and indirect actions in the current Ukrainian crises, cannot be ignored.

## CHAPTER 2: SOCIAL SYSTEMS THEORY

Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory is as eye opening as it is intimidating—at least initially. Luhmann's theory has revolutionized the way social systems are discussed, and can be especially enlightening in our discussion of how different actors approach foreign policy toward Ukraine. However, though his theory looms large in the German-speaking academic world, it is still relatively little-known outside of it (Becker & Seidl, 2006, p.10). Because of its continued novelty among English-speaking audiences (not to mention its theoretical complexity), my introduction of social systems will be lengthier and more in-depth than those of Cooper's theory of the postmodern world or the theory of offensive realism.

Luhmann separates the world into observable process phenomena known as *systems*. These systems vary greatly from one to another, but in all cases possess three basic criteria which, in most cases, Luhmann adapted from principles drawn from biology. First, the systems are *autopoietic*, or self-replicating; a system is not beholden to any external influence in order to continue functioning, but rather is able to sustain and reproduce itself like a single-celled organism undergoing mitosis (Moeller, 2006, p.12). Second, they are *operatively closed*, or self-contained and entirely separated from their environment, like a cell contained within its cellular membrane (Moeller, 2006, p.14). Third, they are *differentiated*, or definably distinct from one another, like a skin cell compared against a blood cell (Moeller, 2006, p.21; Mattheis, 2012, p.629).

Systems are self-contained; there is an unyielding distinction between a system and everything that exists outside of it, referred to as its *environment*. The two are entirely separate; a system cannot communicate with its environment, and vice versa. The environment can, however, affect (or *irritate*) the system, like how an external force can “irritate” a single-cell organism without compromising its cellular membrane. These irritations can in turn prompt the system to respond (or *resonate*) to the irritation, either by working around or by working with it (Moeller, 2006, p.38; Mattheis, 2012, p.631). Additionally, this separation means that a system’s perception of its environment is never fully objective; it is always informed by the nature of the system. To put it another way, a system can never have an unobstructed view of its environment: it can only “see” by looking through its own membrane. Thus, every system defines the environment differently, and therefore defines reality as a whole differently (Moeller, 2006, p.16).

Luhmann’s taxonomy of human systems starts with three broad categories: systems of communication (or social systems), systems of life (or biological systems), and systems of consciousness (or psychological systems) (Moeller, 2006, p.9). Any individual human being is actually, in essence, the interaction point of three different systems: their physical body, their cognitive processes, and their communication (Moeller, 2006, p.10). Luhmann himself deals almost exclusively with this third form.

For Luhmann, society is based upon communication; in fact, the two are so inextricably linked that it is fair to say that society *is* communication (Mattheis, 2012, p.628). More specifically, society is based upon *communication events*—brief communicative interactions where two parties engage in some action that is mutually understood and used to achieve some aim. These communication events can be verbal, as with a conversation, but can also be defined more broadly to include gestures, political participation, even monetary

transactions, along with many other means (Moeller, 2006, pp.22-23). Because the social system is based on an immense aggregate of short-lived, ever-occurring communication events, it is by nature incredibly fluid. The social system shifts and evolves like an ocean roiling with the tide of communication events; its essence is one of change, not constancy. Communication events exist for incredibly brief moments in time; thus the social system, which consists entirely of communication events, must constantly reproduce itself (or undergo autopoiesis) in order to continue existing (Mattheis, 2012, p.628).

The social system is further subdivided into smaller subsystems. Luhmann lists many throughout his works, but never exhaustively; these include the economy, politics, the media, religion, law, science, the military, and so on. Although existing within the social system, each subsystem individually meets the three requirements that define a system: each is autopoietic, operatively closed, and differentiated. For any given subsystem, everything outside of its “membrane”—including the other social subsystems—exist as part of its environment.

While the social system is defined by communication events writ large, individual subsystems are defined by specific types of communication events: the economic system, for instance, is defined by the exchange of money, while the political system is defined by communications of power (Moeller, 2006, p.24); to put it another way, the economic subsystem became the economic subsystem by acting economically, while the political subsystem became the political subsystem by acting politically (Moeller, 2006, p.41). Each subsystem also shares other important characteristics, like a *function* (the contingency or need that the system was formed to fill—for example, the political system formed as a means of making collectively binding decisions), a *code* (the binary of possible resolutions or judgments in each communicative event—for example, in the science system,

communication is coded either “true” or “false,” and if it cannot be coded as such, it cannot be processed by the science system), a *medium* (the means by which communication events occur—for example, the economic system uses the medium of money), and a *program* (a means of judging or engaging in coded communication events based upon the accumulation of previous coded communication events—for example, in the religion system, the use of scriptures, articles of faith, or catechisms) (Moeller, 2006, pp.25-29).

These subsystems represent the largest and most important components of the social system, and I’ll discuss them in more depth momentarily; however, they do not represent the sum total of all communication events, nor can all forms of communication be neatly placed into one of these subsystems. Small talk on a bus, for instance, would rarely entail the communication events necessary for classification into a subsystem. Instead, small talk (and similar communicative exercises) is what Luhmann calls an *interactive communicative episode*. This small-scale, insubstantial communicative event doesn’t fit into a definable subsystem, existing instead as an ephemeral one-off interaction (Moeller, 2006, pp.29-30). A more substantial component of the social system, however, is the *organization*.

Organizations are larger than interactive communicative episodes, but smaller than subsystems; yet their influence is vital to the modern social system. The central characteristic of an organization is *membership*—you’re either in or you’re out—and its central function is *decision-making*. This latter point drives an organization’s autopoiesis: every decision an organization makes leads to further decisions that need to be made, and thus further justifications for the organization’s continued existence. A single subsystem can incorporate countless organizations: the religious subsystem, for instance, incorporates thousands of church organizations with radically different sizes, beliefs, structures, and so on. Similarly, an organization can straddle two or more subsystems: the paramilitary organization FARC,

for example, certainly participates in the military subsystem, but can be just as active in the political subsystem. Organizations like banks, churches, schools and universities, political parties, corporations, and countless others are key players within and between social subsystems (Moeller, 2006, pp.31-32).

However, as important as organizations are (and their role should not be understated), it is the social subsystems that dominate Luhmann's theory of the social system. Just like the three overarching types of systems—physical, psychological and social—subsystems are *differentiated* from one another. In the modern social system, this differentiation is based upon the subsystems' functions; in fact, what I have to this point referred to as *social subsystems* would more accurately be called *function systems* (and shall be referred to as such from this point forward) (Moeller, 2006, p.24). Because of the primacy of function in guiding the modern social system's differentiation, the system as a whole is described as *functionally differentiated*. Functional differentiation is the key defining aspect of modern society, and is what sets it apart from pre-modern social systems. The type of differentiation existing within the social system has developed and evolved through several different iterations throughout history (Moeller, 2006, p.41). The form of differentiation immediately previous to functional differentiation is known as *stratified differentiation*; in this form, the major divisions of society are based not on function, but upon unequal social groups like the Brahmins and the untouchables in India (Moeller, 2006, pp.44-45).

The key difference between functional differentiation and stratified differentiation is in *communication potential*. Whereas people in a functionally differentiated society have equal access to participation in all function systems, people in a stratified differentiated society do not—a medieval European peasant, for instance, would not have the same access to social systems that a nobleman would, who in turn wouldn't have the same access as a

king (Luhmann, 1977, p.33). In a functionally differentiated society, however, every person is equally able to participate in all systems, although—crucially—to unequal degrees: a Silicon Valley CEO and a teenager mowing lawns as a summer job have radically different economic capabilities, but both are equally welcome to exchange what money they have for goods and services in the economic function system (Luhmann, 1977, p.36).

While functional differentiation arose from stratified differentiation, it is important to note that stratified differentiation has not been entirely replaced or eliminated. Although we may speak of functional differentiation as replacing stratification, or of stratification as preceding functional differentiation, it is entirely possible for the two to coexist with one as a primary form of differentiation and the other as a secondary form. This results in some regions (notably post-Soviet states) experiencing far more stratification than others (notably EU member states).

Functional differentiation possesses several advantages over other forms of differentiation, of which I will discuss three major examples. First, it is superior in its ability to resolve open contingencies. In functional differentiation, a function system forms as a direct response to some unfulfilled societal need. For example, when the need arose to set societal norm expectations (especially regarding deviant behavior), the law system was created (Luhmann, 1977, p.31).

Second, it enables the social system to increase in complexity. A more complex social system is more robust and allows for greater problem solving; or, to use Luhmann's terms, a greater ability to resolve open contingencies. As individual function systems themselves become more complex, the overall social system becomes more complex as well. An important means by which function systems increase in complexity is through the expansion or multiplication of organizations.



Third, functional differentiation leads to *structural coupling*, or close interactions between different function systems. While function systems are by definition wholly discrete from one another (remember, for any given function system, all other function systems exist only in the surrounding environment), they are still able to irritate each other (Moeller, 2006, p.36). Function systems respond to the irritation by adjusting or evolving in order to resonate with it. As function systems increase in complexity, two or more function systems may begin to irritate one another more frequently. If this irritation and resonance continues to increase in frequency, the function systems can become structurally coupled, where any development in one prompts a corresponding resonance in the other, and vice versa. This process greatly increases the complexity of participating function systems and makes them more socially relevant (Moeller, 2006, p.37). The political function system acts as a perfect example of structural coupling: although it is definably distinct from all other function systems, communication that occurs in the political system can directly impact economic practices, religious freedoms, or military action, and decisions from the legal system often constrain political processes (Moeller, 2006, pp.38-39).

Although social function systems are global systems, social systems theory does not aspire toward a utopian global citizenry; social systems theory is concerned with communication events, not human individuals, so while communication may be global in nature, individuals are still bound by their respective governments (Moeller, 2006, p.54). Nor has the global social system yet succeeded in subverting the political function system's reliance on divisions between states; instead, borders and regions continue to play a significant role in both dividing and defining the world. Luhmann stresses, though, that this is to be expected. Each system defines its own reality, informed by its own goals and tempered by its interactions with its environment. The political function system is dominated

by a definition of reality where state organizations are not only important—they are necessary conditions to the way politics “works.” Differences in the degree to which different states value sovereignty or borders reflect the differences in their definitions of reality. Yet in spite of all this, all states still exist in the same global political function system (Moeller, 2006, p.56).

When taken together, Luhmann’s social systems theory and Wendt’s constructivist definitions of anarchy pair well in describing interstate relations. Wendt (1992, p.405) describes a communicative process of “signaling, interpreting, and responding” that establishes an intersubjective dialogue and sets the tenor of the interactor relationship (in the case of international relations, the manner or form of anarchy by which two or more states interact). If one state’s signals are interpreted by the other as hostile or aggressive, the second state will similarly respond with aggression or hostility; conversely, if the first state’s signals are interpreted as cooperative, the second state will be more inclined to offer reciprocal cooperative responses. Luhmann’s description of systems creating their own definitions of, explanations for, and rationalizations about their environments indicates that different social systems—based on as disparate of conditions as different cultures, histories, economic makeup, and so on—will interpret different environmental stimuli in different ways; thus, while the governing institutions and organizations in one state may interpret another state’s signal as hostile, that same signal may be interpreted as cooperative (or at least competitive) by government actors in a third state. Hence, it is to be expected that different states will express different foreign policy responses to the same phenomenon.

## **CHAPTER 3: EUROPE**

### **Section 3.1: Europe and Ukraine**

The European Union has been a player in Ukrainian affairs from the beginning: the EU's diplomatic involvement with Ukraine began in the early 1990s, almost immediately following both Ukraine's independence and the official formation of the European Union under the Maastricht Treaty (European Court of Auditors, 2016, p.10). Although initially the relationship was tempered by the EU's reluctance to involve itself too closely with post Soviet states, the geographic situation following the Union's 2004 "Eastward Expansion" placed Ukraine on the EU's eastern frontier, and granted Ukraine a new importance in EU policymaking (Kuzio, 2017, p.105).

Ukraine's importance to the EU spreads across multiple dimensions, beyond a shared border. Ukraine is a large market for European goods; it's the 27<sup>th</sup> largest trade partner for the Union overall, 27<sup>th</sup> largest exporter to the EU, and the 24<sup>th</sup> largest importer of goods from the EU, all of which place Ukraine higher on the list of EU trade partners than all states currently applying for EU membership, with the exception of Turkey (European Commission, 2016, p.1). Its geographical proximity to the EU makes its domestic stability a particularly important security concern for the Union. This fact drove the EU's decision to create the Eastern Partnership, a special dimension of the European Neighborhood Policy that focused primarily on Ukraine and other Eastern European border states (European Court of Auditors, 2016, p.7).

By the unique nature of the European Union, individual EU member states are just as active, if not more so, in foreign policymaking as the overall EU institutions. This makes understanding Ukraine's bilateral dealings with individual European states as important as awareness of its multilateral dealings with the European Union. Germany, for example, is an important trade and investment partner with Ukraine, although that relationship is imperiled by Ukraine's many crises. Germany is the second largest importer to Ukraine; in 2016, Germany exported \$5.52 billion worth of goods (*The Observatory of Economic Complexity*, 2017). Beyond trade, German investment is very important for the Ukrainian economy, totaling \$5.5 billion in 2015. By the end of that same year, Germany was the third highest investor in Ukraine behind Cyprus (home to Ukrainian and Russian oligarchs' shell corporations) and the Netherlands. German firms are particularly involved in metal production, wholesale and retail trade, and rubber; however, their continued investment is jeopardized by economic and political instability, as well as rampant corruption. For many German investors, doing business in Ukraine has proven too costly to continue, and German direct investment dropped 91% in 2014 (Getmanchuk & Solodkyy, 2016, pp.18-20).

While Italian relations with Ukraine may not carry the same weight as German relations in terms of their ability to influence the EU as a whole, they are nonetheless another important example of bilateral foreign policy. This is particularly so given Italy's economic ties to Ukraine: Italy is the fifth largest export destination for Ukraine, importing \$2.66 billion worth of goods in 2016 (*The Observatory of Economic Complexity*, 2017), and the third largest trading partner within the EU (Zarembo, 2016a, p.20). Italy is generally interested in Ukrainian agricultural products, and Italian businesses located in Ukraine focus on real estate, food, and energy, including renewable energy sources (Zarembo, 2016a,

pp.22-23). Both states eagerly hope for a free trade agreement between Ukraine and the EU (Zarembo, 2016a, p.20).

Poland, meanwhile, has much stronger historical and geographic linkages with Ukraine than either of the previous states. Poland once controlled much of Ukraine's modern territory, and Polish cultural influence is still strongly felt in Western Ukraine (Zarembo, 2016b, p.5). Unlike Germany and Italy, Poland shares a border with Ukraine, which brings a sense of immediacy to their bilateral dealings that is not seen in either of our previous examples (Zarembo, 2016b, p.24). Poland exports \$3.53 billion worth of materials to Ukraine, and is the fifth largest import origin for the Ukrainian market (*The Observatory of Economic Complexity*, 2017). After a lull in Polish investments in Ukraine from 2014 to 2015, trade relations have improved dramatically—Zarembo (2016b, p.21) notes that Polish investment in the first half of 2016 totalled \$791 million, already more than the total investments in 2015. Ukraine benefits most from Polish investment in the following economic areas: financial services and insurance; manufacturing; motor vehicle and motorcycle repair; agriculture, forestry, and fisheries; and administrative services (Zarembo, 2016b, p.23). Additionally, Ukrainian workers are much sought out in Poland to replace the large numbers of Polish workers migrating westward (Zarembo, 2016b, p.24).

The foreign policy decisions of each of these actors—the EU, Germany, Italy, and Poland—are typically analyzed in light of their membership in what Cooper calls the *Postmodern World*, a theoretical appellation marking a distinct shift in how certain states view sovereignty, trade, domestic and foreign affairs, and so on. Cooper's theory is a useful framework for describing European involvement with Ukraine, but further analysis from a social systems standpoint can provide deeper insights into the context, motivations, and decisions influencing European foreign policy toward Ukraine.

### **Section 3.2: Cooper's Postmodern Worldview**

Cooper's theory divides contemporary and historical societies into three groups: premodern, modern, and postmodern. The three groups generally represent a spectrum of development along which different societies (in particular, European societies) have either developed or regressed (Cooper, 2000, p.15).

Early societies stretching from Mesopotamia until the end of the Thirty Years' War and the Treaty of Westphalia existed in regional systems (not to be confused with Luhmann's use of the term) that tended towards empire. In this period, rival civilizations sought to subdue their neighbors and bring "order" to "chaos" through the establishment of empire. With conquest came stability—previously belligerent competitors became instead (mostly) peaceful servants of the same ruling authority, allowing for freedom of movement and trade, exchange of ideas, and—importantly—respite from war. However, it takes strong hands to hold an empire together. The component ethnic nations are bound not by common purpose or identity, but by common subjugation, and the ethnic cleavages within an empire must be held fast to prevent their disintegration. Should the empire fall, the region would again enter a state of dangerous chaos, awaiting the next conqueror (Cooper, 2000, pp.10-11). This tight grip discouraged innovation or cultural development, seeing them as potentially subversive; as Cooper (2002) states, "Historically, empires have generally been static."

The binding power of the Catholic church and, later, the Treaty of Westphalia enabled the small European states to introduce a third option to the existing dichotomy of empire and chaos: the balance of power (Cooper, 2000, p.8). The small states of Europe feared both the destructive violence of chaos and the powerless domination of hegemony. Once any one state grew into too much of a threat, its neighbors would begin to balance against their power. This could take the form of either internal balancing, where a single state

increases its own power capabilities in response to a rising threat, or external balancing, where multiple states pool their resources in a coalition whose joint capabilities match or outdo those of the rising power (Cooper, 2002; Walt, 2002, p.212). Although this system did not prevent war—if anything, it promoted increased smaller-scale conflicts—it succeeded for a time in preventing domination by any one hegemon and promoting the liberty of the individual states; as Cooper (2002) described, “domestic order was purchased at the price of international anarchy.” Balance of power existed on the knife’s edge between chaos on side and imperial hegemony on the other, but so long as that balance was maintained, the states involved could experience remarkable benefits. Unlike the rigid authoritarianism of empire, where new ideas were threats to the status quo, the more relaxed rule allowed by balance of power encouraged innovation, leading to many of the great social, political, scientific, and artistic developments across Europe (Cooper, 2000, pp.10-11).

The end of balance-of-power as the European system’s status quo came about slowly. Cooper (2000, p.11) finds the beginning of the end in the 1871 Prussian-led unification of Germany. The emergent German state became a powerhouse, a threat too large for the other European states to balance against as they had previously. When the German threat would grow too great, the other European nations were forced to rely on support from states beyond the traditional bounds of Europe—namely, Russia and the United States.

At roughly the same time, the development of new technologies and the spread of the industrial revolution to the military increased the lethality of warfare dramatically. Like a parade of increasing lethality, machine guns, poison gas, aerial bombings, and, eventually, nuclear weapons drove the stakes of conflict ever higher. In short, the costs of war increasingly outweighed the benefits—a troubling proposition, given the high likelihood of combat under balance of power (Cooper, 2000, p.11).

While Europe's weapons grew more destructive and less controllable, its populations grew exponentially. More and more, the brunt of violence was shifted from military forces to civilians. The devastation of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars exposed greater numbers of nonmilitary Europeans to the horrors that attend warfare. This trend continued until its climax in the First and Second World Wars, where it was in many places accompanied by a rise in democratic power—thus giving a greater political voice to the victims of war (Cooper, 2000, p.11).

The Cold War became the last great theater for European balance of power. Rather than a balance between numerous small powers, it resolved down to a balance between two forces: the liberal democratic West, and the communist autocratic East. The Cold War signaled an end to Eurocentric balance of power, as the centers of power had effectively shifted outside of the traditional sets of European states entirely; instead, the United States and Russia (under the Soviet Union) had graduated from periphery allies to bipoles (Cooper, 2000, p.13).

The end of the Cold War left different regions of the world in various stages of development. In some states, the central government has become weak or ineffectual to the extent that it is no longer able to constrain violence. In these states, chaos reigns, with criminal organizations, rebel groups, or terrorists filling the vacuum left by the government's ineffectuality. Cooper (2000, p.15-16) labels this the pre-modern world, and defines it as a place "where the state has failed and a Hobbesian war of all against all is underway" (Cooper, 2002).

The majority of states exist in the modern world. This world is based upon balance-of-power; security is procured by military power and ensured by balancing against rising threats. Security is defined as managing the status quo; rising powers are viewed with



suspicion as possible revisionist states. As Cooper (2000, p.18) states, “In the pre-modern world, states (or rather would be states) may be dangerous because they are failures; in the modern world, it is the successful states which are potentially dangerous.” This world is characterized by nationalist tribalism—states regard each other with suspicion, as they exist in an anarchical international system. One of the ways this is expressed, and which Cooper (2000, p.16-19) stresses as especially important, is by a strict distinction between internal affairs and external relations. Foreign relations are based upon protecting internal interests, and foreign intervention in internal affairs is seen as a breach of sovereignty.

A few states, mostly located in Europe, found themselves in an entirely new situation at the end of the Cold War. Traditional modern balance-of-power no longer seemed to apply to them. This is the creation of the postmodern world.

### **Section 3.3: Postmodern Europe**

The postmodern world differs radically from the modern one in several key ways. First, postmodern security doesn't come from an inherent mistrust, but from a systemic interdependence (Cooper, 2002). While Europe has been cautious about bringing Ukraine into too much of a position of interdependence, this can be seen in a nascent sense in the EU's continuing efforts to draw Ukraine closer into its open market. At first, early EU-Ukraine treaties like the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and the EU-Ukraine Action Plan kept Ukraine close to Europe (European Court of Auditors, 2016, p.10), but at arm's distance (Averre & Wolczuk, 2016, p.552; European Court of Auditors, 2016, p.7). That began to change during Viktor Yanukovich's term as Ukrainian president, when the EU External Action Service worked with the Ukrainian government to sign a new Association Agreement expanding their cooperation (European Court of Auditors, 2016, p.10). The agreement sought to upgrade Ukraine's status from “neighbor” to “associate,” a change

equaling more than mere semantics: the Association Agreement brought with it benefits in trade, visa-free travel regimes, and financial aid, as well as the remarkable objective of integrating Ukraine over time into the EU internal market (Petrov, Van der Loo, & Van Elsuwege, 2014, p.1). Following the Euromaidan protests, Yanukovych's ouster, and Poroshenko's election, both parties signed the Association Agreement.

Poland has made moves toward military and, on a more limited scale, economic interdependence with Ukraine. In early 2016, Poland, Ukraine, and Lithuania unveiled a combined military force, the Joint Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade (or LITPOLUKRbrig) (Zarembo, 2016b, p.18). Additionally, Polish and Ukrainian agreements allow their nations' gas operators to cooperate along the Polish-Ukrainian border, opening the door for further expansion of pipelines and storage facilities (Zarembo, 2016b, p.20). Poland and Ukraine have expressed a mutual interest in pursuing joint production of military materiel, including helicopters and unmanned drones (Zarembo, 2016b, p.17).

A second difference between postmodern and modern states regards sovereignty. For postmodern states, state sovereignty is no longer jealously guarded; instead, the postmodern world "is a highly developed system for mutual interference in each other's domestic affairs" (Cooper, 2000, p.20), monitored via mutual surveillance and enforced by obedience to codified rules and regulations set by the postmodern community (Cooper, 2002). This was particularly visible during the initial, pre-Euromaidan discussions about the Association Agreement, as many of the factors influencing Yanukovych's decision to walk away from the negotiations had to do with the domestic reform requirements stipulated by the EU as prerequisites to qualify for European aid money, including financial reform and freeing fellow politician and then-prisoner Yulia Timoshenko (Rywkin, 2014, p.122). When the Poroshenko government finally signed the Association Agreement, it did so with full

awareness of EU interference in Ukrainian affairs: in exchange for a six-year financial assistance package totaling 11.2 billion euros and advancing discussions on visa regime liberalization and further financial aid packages, Ukraine is expected to improve its finances, battle corruption in the government and in important business sectors (especially the gas industry), and provide greater legal protection for civil and human rights (*Euractiv.com*, 2017; European Court of Auditors, 2016, p.7).

That same interference is seen in bilateral deals between European states and Ukraine. German Chancellor Angela Merkel has played a direct role in Ukrainian domestic governance, helping to mediate between the Ukrainian prime minister and president in the hopes of preventing governmental power struggles like those that have previously occurred in Kyiv (Getmanchuk & Solodkyy, 2016, p.13). Meanwhile, Italy, as a decentralized state with strong regional powers, is a vocal proponent of Ukrainian decentralization, believing that Ukraine can learn from its own experiences with decentralization and can address many of the concerns behind the Eastern separatist movements by doing so (Zarembo, 2016a, pp.11-12). In Poland, although Ukraine is already among the top ten recipients of development aid money, officials concern themselves with promoting the reduction of Ukraine's bureaucracy, combatting corruption, and creating a more effective and effectual government (Zarembo, 2016b, p.20).

Third, postmodern states rely upon transnational institutions, a reliance that smashes the traditional barriers dividing states. In spite of Germany, Italy, and Poland's individual bilateral dealings with Ukraine, each invests heavily in the success of EU-level negotiations. Germany, especially through the efforts of Angela Merkel, has used its considerable influence to maintain a unified support for Ukraine both domestically and in the EU at large, as well as through communications and coordination with the United States (Getmanchuk &

Solodkyy, 2016, p.13). Despite Italy's strong diplomatic linkages with Russia dating back to the Cold War, it has often advocated for pro-Ukrainian policy positions within the framework of the EU, including voting for the ratification of the Association Agreement (albeit with reservations), vigorously supporting the Minsk Agreements, encouraging a Ukrainian visa-free regime, and pursuing legal action against Russian elites targeted by sanctions (Zarembo, 2016a, pp.8-9). Poland, meanwhile, was a strong proponent of Ukraine even before the Orange Revolution ushered in Ukraine's pro-European movement (Zarembo, 2016b, p.4). Poland has also floated the idea of creating a new international institution, potentially operating alongside the EU and NATO, called the Intermarium Union. This Union would involve Poland, Ukraine, and states along the Adriatic and Baltic seas (Zarembo, 2016b, p.18).

Fourth, unlike modern states, postmodern states maintain security not by force, but by diplomacy and other alternative means. The European Union as a transnational institution is an excellent example of this, as it possesses no military function—it relies on NATO and the individual military capabilities of its member states for its hard power defense. However, the EU is still very involved in resolving the security crisis in Eastern Ukraine; instead of relying on military power, though, it has used a combination of targeted economic sanctions and attempts at diplomatically brokering a peace agreement with Ukraine, Russia, and the eastern separatist regions. The Minsk Accords (and the later Minsk II Accords) involved key European players and the United States orchestrating ceasefire and peace talks between the active parties in the conflict—as yet to little success (Bendavid & Fairless, 2015).

Germany's role in the Minsk Accords has been especially active, considering the traditional German opinion of Ukraine has been that of just another post-Soviet state descending ever closer to dictatorship. This dim view changed after Euromaidan, however,

and Germany is beginning to take Ukraine's European aspirations more seriously (Getmanchuk & Solodkyy, 2016, p.6). Germany has since taken a lead role in driving Ukraine-related efforts like the Minsk Accords and the Association Agreement, in spite of the fact that Germany is not obligated by treaty to do so—unlike the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, Germany is not a signatory to the Budapest Memorandum (Getmanchuk & Solodkyy, 2016, pp.9-10).

Italy has taken a prominent role in promoting and enforcing sanctions on Russia and in supporting the Minsk talks. In both cases, Italy's primary motivation is the avoidance of military intervention (Zarembo, 2016a, pp.11-14).

Sixth, according to Cooper (2002), the ultimate and most successful form the postmodern world can take is that of "liberal imperialism." Cooper (2002) points to the EU's expansions—particularly its Eastern expansion—as a template for what he describes as an "imperialism of neighbors," or a "cooperative empire." Recognizing the distasteful connotations the word "imperialism" dredges up—particularly, and ironically, among postmodern states—he nevertheless asserts that creating a willing, liberal, democratic commonwealth "empire."

Now, in spite of the promises issued by the Ukrainian government that Ukraine would apply for EU accession by 2020 (*Reuters*, 2014) and the eager lobbying by Poland for Ukraine to join both the EU and NATO (Zarembo, 2016b, p.6), there are no current plans in the works for a second "eastward expansion" to incorporate Ukraine into the European Union; if ever there were, surely the British referendum in 2016 shifted attention dramatically elsewhere (Kuzio, 2017, p.104-106). However, closer ties with both the EU and NATO are powerful incentives, and have in large part driven the rhetoric used in both the Euromaidan movement and in subsequent Ukrainian government action (MacDuffee Metzger

et al., 2016). Cooper (2004, p.27) even views the EU's Neighborhood Policy, and we can assume the subsequent Association Agreement, as a nascent form of incorporating Ukraine and its regional neighbors into the Union (Cooper, 2004, p.27).

### **Section 3.4: European Social Systems**

The foreign policy actions of the European Union—and by extension, its member states—are heavily driven by economics. This makes sense—European economic institutions (which, in Luhmann's terms, would be referred to as *organizations*, the social systems categorization they fit best into) are very complex. After all, the EU started as an economic institution in the European Coal and Steel Community that only branched into politics after time had passed. The transnational institutions, including those that constitute the EU (each a decision-making organization), straddle the economic and political function systems, but the comparative overdevelopment of the economy lends itself toward economic responses (for example, conditional loan disbursements, or sanctions).

The decreasing importance of state boundaries within the EU is perfectly in line with social systems theory, which states that borders are important only so far as they are imbued with meaning by the political system (Luhmann, 1997, p.72). When transnational institutions began connecting state-level governmental organizations, it began a process whereby the European political system reconfigured its conceptions of reality. Borders maintained their importance, but the level of importance attributed to them, particularly within the Schengen area, has demonstrably lessened. While a visa-free regime is a far cry from the type of open border policy espoused by the Schengen states, it is still indicative of the European political system's changing definitions of what elements are important in the makeup of a state. This is true also between countries—Poland, for instance, is working with Ukraine to improve

their border crossings as a means of better facilitating Ukrainian workers migrating to fill Polish jobs (Zarembo, 2016b, pp.24-25).

The interactions occurring between political organizations (political parties, institutions, civil society groups, and so on) are critical in determining foreign policy. European societies, including the European Union itself (although the nature and extent of this case is bitterly debated), possess representational political systems. Moravcsik (1997, p.518) describes state governing institutions as inherently tied to a subgroup or subset within the overall domestic society; in other words, if the Social Democrats gain a majority of parliamentary seats in a given state, the governing institutions will represent the preferences of Social Democrats. These governing institutions are in flux as they are captured and recaptured by shifting coalitions of social actors, which places pressure on the government to conform to the preferences of the dominant social actors and which in turn morphs state preferences to match. Hence, regarding European foreign policy toward Ukraine, the need to be mindful of pro- and anti-Ukrainian actors. Among the former are Italian media organizations TG3, L'Unita, and La Stampa (Zarembo, 2016a, p.34); the Christian Democrat and Christian Socialist parties in Germany (Getmanchuk & Solodkyy, 2016, p.35); and the ruling Law and Justice party in Poland. Among the latter are the Lega Nord party in Italy (Zarembo, 2016a, pp.30-31), the German *Russlandverstehers* ("those who understand Russia") (Getmanchuk & Solodkyy, 2016, p.35); and a growing grassroots antipathy toward Ukrainian immigrants in Poland (Zarembo, 2016b, p.39).

Unlike Cooper, who seems to esteem postmodern states as better or more progressive than their counterparts, Luhmann (1997, p.77) would likely be loathe to make such a judgment. Certainly the heightened social complexity of Europe, due in large part to the establishment of powerful transnational decision-making organizations, has led to greater

resolution of open contingencies, better problem solving capabilities, and an increase in structural coupling between function systems; but Luhmann is quick to remind that greater development within or among function systems is not the same thing as them becoming *better*. Indeed, there can be a great deal of uncertainty and risk in such a “polycentric, polycontextual society” (Luhmann, 1997, p.75-76). Recent events have highlighted the many imperfections in the European systems, from the large-scale exclusion of refugees and migrants from access to function systems (a topic that certainly merits its own future exploration) (Ostrand, 2015) to the ever-present interstate bickering arising from organizational competition in a liberal intergovernmentalist union (Moravcsik, 1993, p.480; Schimmelfennig, 2015, p.184).

This last point is particularly clear in the truly European struggle of state versus transnational institution, of which the 2016 British referendum decision to leave the EU is a pointed example. These disagreements can slow or even entirely hobble the EU’s decision-making process. Another illustration of this is the recurring debate over Russian sanctions. Continuing the sanction regime against Russia requires the collective support of EU member states, each a powerful decision-making organization with its own definitions of its environment and its own drive towards autopoiesis. Within each state are further organizations and movements with their own definitions of reality and autopoietic goals; and so on (Kuzio, 2017, p.108). This presents a complicated power structure where an organization spanning a subcontinent can be halted by a communication event in one small region, well illustrated by the initial Dutch rejection of the Association Agreement with Ukraine in April 2016 (Tartwijk, 2016).



## **CHAPTER 4: RUSSIA**

### **Section 4.1: Structural and Offensive Realism**

Offensive realism is a subset of neorealism, and as such it borrows heavily from neorealism's assumptions. Neorealism theories build upon the central conceit that the structure of the international system is anarchical in nature; this focus on the structure of anarchy has led neorealism to also be known as "structural realism." With no global authority to appeal to, states are left to fend for their own interests (Elman, 1996, pp.19-20; Waltz, 2001, p.159). This assumption profoundly impacts the way states interact with one another; within a single state, the behavior of individuals or organizations can be regulated using laws or appeals to higher authority, but in the international system, that higher authority does not exist. States are instead left to their own devices to ensure their continued existence and prosperity.

Due to a variety of reasons—access to resources, strength of the economy, historical development, and so on—different states have differing levels of military capabilities. Those states that are capable of mounting offensive military campaigns are known as great powers. The power differentials inherent in such an environment, coupled with the lack of global regulations on state activity, generate a profound absence of trust between states. This is especially true when judging another state's motives. Behavior that, to one state, may seem perfectly harmless or reasonable may be viewed as provocative or outright threatening by their neighbor. No state can afford to take another state's actions lightly, and no amount of reassurances on the part of the acting state can truly placate any other (Mearsheimer, 2001,

pp.30-31). This uncertainty leads to the security dilemma—if any state increases its power relative to its neighboring states, even if just as a defensive measure, the neighbors cannot trust that their developing power will not be used against them, and must increase their own power in order to balance the rising threat (Elman, 1996, p.15; Mearsheimer, 2001, pp.35-36). This in turn leads to balance of power theory, in which states attempt to “check” rising powers by maintaining a relative power parity, either through increasing their internal power capabilities or by combining their power with external allies (Walt, 2002, p.212).

In the uncertainty bred by anarchy, a state must place its own survival as its utmost concern. Without the luxury of truly binding international laws or oversight, states are left to ensure their continued existence through the accumulation and use of military and economic power. A state’s actions are based primarily on the desire to maximize its chances of survival. While some decisions great power states make may seem strange to outside observers, their decisions are rational, and are aimed at promoting their self interest (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp.30-31).

#### **Section 4.2: Russian Offensive Realism**

Offensive realism expands upon neorealist theory, with an especial interest in the importance of power differentials. Power differentials refer to the relative power between multiple states; a great power will generally have a significant power advantage over its competitors. Generally, the more great powers exist in a region, the less stable the region becomes (Elman, 1996, p.15). For offensive realists, states need to prioritize increasing their power differential and maintaining regional dominance over their neighbors. Security is a scarce resource, and the only sure way for a state to guarantee its “supply” is to accrue increasingly beneficial power differentials. Offensive realist foreign policy focuses on maximizing power and claiming as much security as possible, at other states’ expense

(Mearsheimer, 2001, p.36). This system leads to—and in fact encourages—aggressive foreign policy behaviour; after all, if a state has no reason to believe other states will cede them power willingly, it must claim it for itself (Walt, 2002, p.207). The ultimate means of ensuring power in offensive realism is to obtain regional hegemony (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.34; Walt, 2002, p.208).

Offensive realism provides a very accurate framework for understanding the Russian response to the Euromaidan movement. Russia's zero sum view of influence in the common neighborhood, along with its profound security concerns over Ukraine's potential membership in Western treaties, shows a deep buy in to offensive realism's conceptualization of security as a scarce resource. Russia, eager to claim more security for itself, has embarked on a series of aggressive foreign policy measures using both economic and military hard power. When it perceived that the EU was emerging as a rising threat, it struck out at Ukraine as a means of preserving Russian hegemony in Eastern Europe.

Russia's primary foreign policy goal is establishing itself as a regional power, especially over the former dominion of the Soviet Union (Götz, 2015, p.9). Much of the urgency behind this goal comes from a sense of needing to check the increasing power of the EU, which Russian politicians have described as an "emerging hyper-power" (Götz, 2015, p.4). Götz (2015, p.9) notes that Russia's actions in Ukraine are not the frenzied conquests of a revisionist state, but the deliberate moves of a great power. In the "common neighborhood," that often results in friction with the EU (Haukkala, 2016, p.654).

Haukkala (2016, pp.655-656) divides Russia's challenges to the EU's regional dominance into three. First, in the 1990s, when Russia was weakened after the fall of the Soviet Union, it paid rhetorical praise to EU standards, ideals, and goals while in practice doing little if anything to attain them. Second, in the early 2000s, Russia actively began to

distance itself from those same goals and ideals. Instead, Russian discourse became embittered toward the United States and the EU, accusing them of taking advantage of Russia's post-Soviet weakness to impose unwanted foreign policies while marginalizing the Russian state. The Russian government also blasted the EU for forcing states in the "common neighborhood" into a choice between Europe or Russia. Third, Russia's most recent moves, first with the Eurasian Customs Union and Economic Union and then later with its activities in Ukraine, show a state that is confident in its ability to tussle for regional dominance.

Ukraine itself is very important to Russia. The border between the two states runs nearly 1500 miles long and is situated close to not only the Russian capital, but its economic and industrial centers as well (Götz, 2015, p.3). Ukraine's population of 45 million makes it a large market for Russian exports—a market that would effectively close should Ukraine adopt European merchandise standards beyond Russia's capabilities to reproduce. Furthermore, if Ukraine were to begin colluding with the European Union, Russia would see it as an incursion by a competitive great power into its sphere of influence. Because of this, as Russia became more and more emboldened, Ukraine came to be a rational area to assert Russia's growing dominance. Russian policy in the "common neighborhood" quickly centered on distancing Ukraine from Western alliances and institutions (Götz, 2015, p.4). In many ways, Russian policy in Ukraine has been deliberately provocative, a means of thumbing their nose at the EU (Haukkala, 2016, p.653).

During the Yanukovich years, Russia achieved many of its aspirations in Ukraine, although not all. Their ambitions in Ukraine were both enabled and checked by the Ukrainian government—though Yanukovich is often characterized as being pro-Russian, that was not be entirely the case. It's true that he had closer ties to Russia than to the West, and he certainly didn't meet European norms of good governance, but it would be more accurate to

state his position not as pro-Russian or pro-European, but rather as pro-Yanukovych. Hence, while he did capitulate to Russia by forestalling Ukraine's attempts to join NATO and by extending the Russian navy's lease of Crimean ports an additional quarter of a century, he also hedged his bets and pursued the Association Agreement with the European Union (Götz, 2015, p.4). This was met in Russia with much displeasure. They responded first by cutting off trade with Ukraine, before extending the offer of a substantial aid package should Kyiv back away from the Association Agreement (Götz, 2015, p.5).

Again, Yanukovych capitulated to Russia, but this time he encountered an unexpected amount of resistance from Ukrainian citizens, including the overtly pro-European Euromaidan movement, resulting in his eventual removal from office (Götz, 2015, p.5). This was a dangerous development in Russia's zero-sum game for control of its neighbors. Putin decried Yanukovych's expulsion as an illegal, illegitimate coup, an example of the unscrupulous West interfering in the sovereignty of foreign states (Marten, 2015, p.189), but the damage was done, and the worst had happened—Ukraine had unabashedly chosen Europe instead of Russia.

The Putin government decided to change tack. Götz (2015, p.5) divides their response into four strategies, beginning first with the annexation of Crimea. Second, Russia refused to recognize Ukraine's interim government, referring to them instead as a "fascist junta" and raising gas prices dramatically. Third, Russia played into long-simmering belligerence in Eastern Ukraine, instigating protests and, eventually, an uprising. Fourth, the Russians sought to force the Ukrainian government into granting greater autonomy to the regions bordering Russia, allowing its northern neighbor to exert influence over them. If all went well, Russian troops may have been able to be stationed in the autonomous regions as peacekeepers, ensuring that Ukraine remained firmly under Russian dominance.

While not all of Russia's strategies have turned out as planned, they have succeeded in creating a number of crises for Ukraine. The first critical crisis was the annexation of Crimea. Since Ukraine gained its independence, Russia—eager to maintain a naval presence in the Black Sea—has leased land in Sevastopol on the Crimean peninsula to house their naval bases. That lease has been a continuing friction point between the two states, but Russia has always been successful in applying pressure that allows them to keep their bases running (Marten, 2015, pp.189-190). When the Euromaidan movement succeeded in removing Yanukovich from office, the continuation of Russia's lease agreement fell into question, and soldiers in unmarked uniforms suddenly appeared on the peninsula (Götz, 2015, pp.5-6). These soldiers, called "polite people" in Russian, were better known by their Ukrainian moniker, the "little green men." They secured the peninsula and paved the way for the passage of a referendum on Crimea seceding from Ukraine and joining instead with Russia (Marten, 2015, p.189).

By far the most devastating crisis Russia has fomented, though, is the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Protests in opposition to the post-Yanukovich government in the East, and especially in the Donbas region, quickly turned violent before spiraling out of control. While there is still not damning evidence of the Russian government's involvement, circumstantial evidence abounds. Poorly equipped local militia members with irregular fatigues and weapons are joined not only by Russian and Crimean "protest tourists," but by squads of disciplined and experienced soldiers clad in Russian armor and bearing Russian weapons while carrying out carefully planned and executed operations. While native Ukrainian separatists do seem to be leading the rebel groups, it is apparent that Russia is keeping them well stocked and supplied (Götz, 2015, p.6). Why might Russia be interested in creating this particular conflict? Both Götz (2015, p.7) and Marten (2015, p.190) point out that NATO

does not allow states to join if they are in the midst of ethnic warfare. Beyond this, it's possible that Russia viewed such action as a low-risk, low-cost means of dealing with Ukraine; no massive Russian troop rollout was needed if Ukrainian separatists could be coopted instead, and while there may be a global outcry against the situation, it was expected to disappear into the fog of other world crises and be forgotten. This hope was dashed, however, when a separatist militia shot down a Malaysian airliner carrying dozens of European citizens, solidifying European opposition to Russia (Marten, 2015, p.197).

### **Section 4.3: Russian Social Systems**

Offensive realism proves very useful in describing the immediate context of Russian foreign policymaking vis-à-vis Ukraine, but social systems theory enables us to take a far more in-depth look at the social and societal background. This is possible for many reasons, but in particular because the neorealist tradition focuses its level of analysis on states; anything in the domestic domain is not considered (Elman, 1996). Social systems theory, however, focuses on all of society, and is thus suited to investigate the inner workings of Russian social and organizational systems.

For Luhmann (1997, p.70), the great danger in a functionally differentiated system is *exclusion*. Following the dissolution of the USSR and the disastrous economic turns of the 1990s, Russia as a state was marginalized, its people impoverished, and the threat of state-level exclusion from global systems began to loom unsettlingly large. Whether or not such a statewide exclusion was actually possible is beside the point; instead, the point is that key elements of the Russian social system defined their reality as such that exclusion was imminent.

As Russia stabilized throughout the 2000s, it did so thanks mostly to two factors: state control of natural gas deposits, and an ever-expanding executive power. Neither factor

is conducive to long-term stability, however, and both in turn contribute to the stratification of the Russian political system. As Ahrend (2005, p.585) described, the Russian economy's reliance on natural gas does not in and of itself condemn the state to a "resource curse;" however, the solutions Ahrend enumerates—sound fiscal policy, a non-corrupt and efficient state apparatus, a strong civil society, and diversification of the economy—have yet to materialize. In their stead the resource sector is controlled by state-sanctioned oligarchs, often given majority shares in gas companies as recompense for service to the state (Gel'man, 2016, p.455). In short, Russia's continued overreliance on its natural gas deposits has underdeveloped its economic organizations, financed the stratification of the political function system, and weakened Russia's long-term ability to reliably participate in the global economy.

The second factor in Russia's stabilization is the consolidation of power by the government's executive branch. Constitutions play an important role in Luhmann's descriptions of the state; a constitution is an example of structural coupling between the law function system and the political function system—a legal document with real political power (Mattheis, 2012). The Russian constitution, however, is weak, and fails to constrain the already-powerful executive branch (Sakwa, 2010). Within the political system, the executive branch (including the office of the president) is what Luhmann would label a decision-making organization, and a powerful one—it occupies the central role in Russian government. It possesses a dual-natured autopoiesis: its primary autopoietic process, making decisions that ensure its continued functioning, is paired with a secondary process of making decisions that preserve its status at the top of the stratified political subsystem. It does so by way of informal patronage networks—social subsystems wherein access is limited to a privileged few clients and elites (Hale, 2005, p.137).



However, the tension between a hierarchical power structure within a global system built upon equal access to function systems can lead to widespread unrest, social movements, demonstrations, and even revolution. Those at the top of the power hierarchy fear social unrest; the fate of the Yanukovych regime following the Maidan movement illustrates why. This proves to be a powerful motivator for states like Russia to react strongly against such movements in their neighbors, both to delegitimize the specific social movements in the other states and to disincentivize malcontents in their own state from acting similarly (Koesel & Bunce, 2013).

The importance of the informal stratified systems (and its own subdivisions, like patronage networks) in the post-Soviet region should not be understated. They have a heavy influence on the rest of Russian society; in social systems terms, they have structurally coupled with the political, legal, and media function systems, as well as many more. Because they are differentiated by stratification instead of function, they cut across functional barriers and are present across the broad spectrum of Russian organizations; as Moravcsik (1997, 518) describes, “Clientalistic authoritarian regimes may distinguish those with familial, bureaucratic, or economic ties to the governing elite from those without.” Marten (2015, p.196) gives a particularly salient illustration of this: Viktor Medvedchuk, one of Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko’s early patrons, has since become a spokesperson for Eastern rebel groups. Yet when Medvedchuk participated in the Minsk II discussions, he did so as a representative of the Ukrainian state. Why was he chosen to fill this contradictory role? Because Vladimir Putin is the godfather of one of Medvedchuk’s daughters.

This stratification plays an important role in determining Russian foreign policy. Returning to Moravcsik’s (1997, p.518) idea of state preferences, in a nonrepresentational system like Russia, the state is constrained by the interests of actors at the top of the power

hierarchy, and state preferences are set accordingly. When these actors are sufficiently risk-accepting or insulated from the negative effects of war, combined with an inability of the law or representative institutions to limit their ability act, their power “tends to be wielded in a more *arbitrary* manner...leading both to a wider range of expected outcomes and a more conflictual average” (Moravcsik, 1997, p.532). Thus the dissonance between Russian stratification and the global systems’ functional differentiation places enormous stress on the ruling elite and enables them to react in ways outside observers would label extreme. By these extreme actions—for example, annexing Crimea, or sowing discord in Eastern Ukraine—the Russian leadership hopes to keep its privileged place astride both the functionally differentiated global society and the stratified Russian society.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Postmodern states and offensive realism are effective at describing the foreign policy decisions and behavior shown by actors in the Ukraine crisis, but social systems theory is able to provide a much deeper look into *why* and *how* each actor makes the decisions they do. It accomplishes this by comparing the regional distinctions of each actor with the global systems in which they participate, which in turn informs, first, how the actors define the world and their role in it, and second, their relationship to (and subsequent obligations or rights concerning) other actors.

Ukraine is positioned where the European Eastern Partnership meets the Russian sphere of influence. This puts Ukraine between two very different regions, each having developed in unique ways and resulting in different regional reactions toward global society. On the one side, the European states have developed powerful interstate institutions, the best example being the European Union, that have dramatically altered their state political organizations; however, the tension between these transnational institutions and the governments of the individual member states hinders their ability to act swiftly or decisively, leaving states like Ukraine that depend upon their actions in the lurch. On the other side, the Russian state possesses a strongly hierarchical political system in which a powerful executive branch, supported by informal patronage networks, exerts control over policy decisions, most often as means of safeguarding their privileged position at the top of the hierarchy.

In recent years, the result has been like two powerful river currents smashing together, often leaving Ukraine battered and disoriented in their confluence. Although each

of the actors investigated in this paper exists within a global social system, the regional differences between them radically and fundamentally affect both their means and manner of participation therein.

In seeking a resolution to Ukraine's crises, one must look deeper than explanatory theories separating European and Russian policymaking into two competing worldviews; this runs the risk of accepting their regional differences as fact, in essence declaring "Europeans are from Mars, Russians are from Venus." Instead, a practical exploration into *why* their systems differ and *how* their social structures inform their foreign policies not only reveals much more about their policymaking, but also invites further opportunities for understanding, for finding common ground, and perhaps even for conflict resolution.

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